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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3279
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 000386

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/22/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE REACTION TO SECRETARY CLINTON'S ASIA
TRIP

REF: MANILA 239

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The Secretary's choice of Asia as the destination for her inaugural overseas travel has received widespread attention in Philippine national media, where it has been viewed as an important signal that U.S. engagement with the region will be a priority with the new administration. Her statement outlining plans to participate in ASEAN meetings to be held in Bangkok in July was especially welcomed. The positive Philippine reaction has been somewhat tempered by public disappointment that the Philippines was not included as a stop on this trip. However, in discussions with the Ambassador, Philippine Foreign Secretary Romulo welcomed Secretary Clinton's interest in Southeast Asia, and expressed hopes that the U.S. might become a signatory of ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Philippine national print and broadcast media have closely followed the Secretary's itinerary, reporting her remarks in Korea, China, and elsewhere. The Secretary's announcement that she would attend July meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to be held in Bangkok found special resonance in the Philippines, a key proponent of ASEAN's greater role in fostering democracy in the region. The positive reaction to renewed U.S. attention to the region has been tempered somewhat in Manila by the absence of the Philippines on the Secretary's itinerary. Several columnists have gone as far as to assert that it symbolizes the declining importance of the longstanding U.S.-Philippine relationship that dates back to the country's half century as a U.S. territory.

3. (C) Meeting on the margins of a February 23 event at Malacanang Palace marking recent U.S. legislation that will compensate Filipino World War II veterans who fought alongside American troops, the Ambassador discussed the Secretary's trip with Philippine Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo. Secretary Romulo was pleased at Secretary Clinton's assurances that she will attend the July ASEAN meetings in Bangkok, and he expressed enthusiasm at the United States position on ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), as outlined by the Secretary in Jakarta.

KENNEY